

its great theoretical significance, and because of the need of the children themselves to receive wise treatment from parents and educators. In the letter on p. 151, a responsible matron tells the mother of the masturbating child that the child "will go out of her mind if it is not stopped". It is a very serious state of affairs that such falsehoods can still to-day be used to terrify both parents and children, and often itself to create the very harm which is attributed to the masturbatory act.

It is quite untrue that masturbation in itself can cause such serious disturbances of mind or body as are here attributed to it. When it is associated with serious mental disturbance or bodily ill-health, as it is in some of the children quoted in these letters, the key lies in the *phantasies* which the act of masturbation expresses, and the excessive anxiety arising from these phantasies.

The public attitude towards masturbation in little children tends to take one of two directions. The first, which is by far the commonest and most traditional, is the view that masturbation is not only a harmful, but a wicked thing, and must be instantly stopped if moral and physical ruin is not to follow. Now this attitude, although completely exaggerated, and false in its exaggeration, does recognise the truth that masturbation has a psychological significance, and that its intention is anti-social. The second attitude, very modern, and found in far fewer people—those, mostly, who feel themselves emancipated from sexual prejudices—is that the act of masturbation has no significance at all and is a purely localised sensation reflex which need not be commented on by educators and will die away of itself as the child gets older. Now this view is a probably far safer

attitude for parents to take, and it is descriptively true that the great majority of children, who are not severely punished or terrified out of their wits by threats of the harm that will ensue from masturbation, do grow out of it as their normal interests and activities develop. Nevertheless, this second view has as much *theoretical* falsehood in it as the first view. It is not true that the act is purely localised and without psychological significance. It has profound psychological significance, but of so general and normal a kind that under any ordinarily favourable environment, most children find their own normal solution to the mental conflict which at